

Message

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Sent: 2/1/2012 2:41:29 PM
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Subject: NEWS UPDATES: GOP Demands Report On Italian Lab (Inside EPA)

Attachments: DIB0001

Federal Facilities Watch

Incorporating Defense Environment Alert

GOP Demands Report On Italian Lab

Posted: January 31, 2012

Citing a recent report on *Inside EPA*, congressional Republicans are demanding that EPA and National Toxicology Program (NTP) officials release a long-awaited report that is intended to determine whether toxicity data from a controversial Italian laboratory -- data that EPA included in several key chemical risk assessments -- may have overstated the substances' risks.

Should the report confirm earlier indications that the Ramazzini Foundation's data overstated cancer risks, it could further undermine EPA's Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) database -- the chemical risk

assessment program that is the basis for many environmental regulations, as well as cleanup and product safety standards.

“EPA's denial of a staff request for a copy of the report has required us to express our frustration with your withholding of important scientific information related to chemical assessments,” according to the Jan. 31 letter urging EPA research chief Paul Anastas and Linda Birnbaum, director of NTP, to release the report.

GOP Sens. James Inhofe (OK) and David Vitter (LA), key minority leaders on the Senate environment committee signed the letter, along with Republican Reps. Paul Broun (GA) and Andy Harris (MD), who chair key panels on the House science committee.

In 2010, EPA stalled four pending chemical assessments -- methanol, the fuel additives methyl tertiary butyl ether (MTBE) and ethyl tert-butyl ether (ETBE), and the plastic ingredient acrylonitrile -- as well as existing assessments of vinyl chloride and 1,1 dichloroethylene (DCE) following an initial NTP review of the institute's results and methods. That review found a lower incidence of lymphoma or leukemia in the institute's lab rats exposed to methanol than Ramazzini scientists found. All six EPA assessments at issue had included Ramazzini data.

A team of NTP pathologists traveled to the Italian labs in spring 2011 to perform a more extensive pathology working group review (PWG) of several Ramazzini studies, partly funded by EPA. Sources told Inside EPA earlier this month that the report is completed, and is to be released “soon,” pending a meeting between Anastas and Birnbaum to discuss the “interpretation” of its findings.

But the Republican lawmakers are now seeking the PWG's final report. “It is our understanding that EPA and NTP received the PWG report last November. While your respective agencies continue to deliberate over your interpretation of the PWG report, we request that you provide a copy so that we may review the PWG's findings,” the members of Congress write.

Their letter directs EPA and NTP to provide a “complete and unredacted” copy by Feb. 7, as well as “a summary of the weight of evidence placed on the Ramazzini Institute's work in IRIS' assessment for reference doses of methanol”; “an update on the status of EPA's position on whether to accept recent peer review of the non-cancer effects of methanol” and “a list of all chemical assessments that include, or may include in the future, work performed at the Ramazzini Institute.”

In addition to seeking a copy of the pathology review of the Ramazzini Foundation toxicity data, the GOP lawmakers also urged EPA to “carefully consider all assessments currently under review” that incorporate studies from the Ramazzini Institute.

The lawmakers warn that report on Ramazzini may raise additional concerns over both EPA's IRIS program and NTP's chemical assessment programs. “During this past year, both the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) have reported significant concerns with the IRIS program. This has led to bipartisan letters of concern to both of your agencies, as well as the FY 2012 appropriations conference report language directing your agencies to contract with the NAS to conduct additional reviews of the quality of work at NTP and EPA.”

Republicans and some Democrats have increasingly questioned IRIS assessments and some of NTP's carcinogenicity findings in its most recent Report on Carcinogens. A prime example is the report language attached to EPA's 2012 spending bill, urging the agency to have NAS review up to three IRIS assessments released in 2012.

While the PWG is expected to reiterate problems first indicated in the methanol review, supporters of the lab note that its methodology is intentionally different from that of most American labs, in ways that its scientists argue more closely mimic human lives. But industry and other critics argue the methods are confounded by

other diseases and old age in their lab animals.

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